

[Cruz Richards Alvarez]

Marie Carter

Anthony,

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OLD TIMERS STORIES

Cruz Richards Alvarez, of Old Mesilla, is a man who takes great pride in his ancestry. So when I requested him to tell me something about his family history he complied, and began:

"My great-grandfather, John Richards, was a prominent London physician, who took a notion to embark for America. His two sons, Ruben and Stephen, accompanied him. Their mother was dead. [?????]

"While they were at sea the crew mutinied. John Richards must have been a game old boy. For he took charge of the ship and brought it to Galveston, Texas. At a later date, however, he was beheaded by the Indians, consequently, the boys were left orphans in the wilds of Texas. Ruben, who was destined to become my grandfather, joined the American Army under General Scott in Mexico. On returning from the Mexican war he stopped at Precido, Texas, which was Mexico, and met my future grand-mother."

"Love at first sight, followed by a prendorio, or engagement announcement," I suggested.

"According to the old Spanish custom there should have been a prendorio, but in this case, everything went haywire. The girl's father, Francisco Hernandez," he explained, "as a rich

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old guy with lots of money and cattle and thought Ruben was an adventurer with designs on the family fortune. So he told him to begone or he would shoot him.

"Did he go?"

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"Si Senora, muy pronto. But he came back. Then what do you think happened?" he asked.

"I can't Imagine."

"He kidnapped the girl."

Reuben Richards, the man who kidnapped his / sweetheart and married her, was also a soldier in the Civil War. He joined the Federal Army, and his brother Stephen joined the Confederate army. Cruz Richards Alvarez, the grandson of Reuben Richards, was in the Diplomatic Service of the United States during the World War; attached to the American Embassy at Madrid Spain. At the present time he is an Attorney of Old Mesilla [;?] and the President of the Chamber of Commerce.

When I asked Cruz Richards Alvarez to tell me something about Old Mesilla, he replied:

"Thrilling national history and romance are imprinted an the placid tree-lined streets of Mesilla. On November 20, 1854, the official confirmation of the Gadsden Purchase Treaty, wherein Mesilla and Southern Arizona were purchased for ten million dollars from Mexico, took place in its picturesque plaza."

"Do you happen to know the names of the officers who represented the United States and Mexico on that eventful day?" I inquired.

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"Yes. General Sam Garland represented the United States, and General Angel Trias represented the Mexican Government. Have you seen the Spanish pavilion which marks the site where the two flags floated during that international adjustment?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied. "What is its history?"

"Well, it is modeled exactly on the lines of a bandstand of the period of the Gadsden Purchase, when Mesilla and all the territory south of the [Gila?] river to the present international boundary came into the possession of the United States. The pillars of the grandstand have a history, too. They were carried to La Mesilla by ox-team before the Civil War and used in building the first flour mill. It was dedicated June 24, 1932. After the pillars of the Mesilla grandstand were discarded by the flour mill, they were bought by John Lemon and used to form rafters in his home. Incidentally, Mr. Lemon, was killed in a battle between Republicans and Democrats about 1875 in the rear of the bandstand's present location.

The Republicans, who were parading on the streets of La Mesilla, were suddenly attacked by the Democrats. The attack was followed by a fierce battle. During the gun fight some of the bullets struck and tore holes in the brass instruments carried by the Republicans' band.

"Mr. Alvarez "I said,"How did Colonel John R. Baylor factor in the history of Old Mesilla?

"Well, in 1861, when Mesilla became the capital of Arizona, Colonel Baylor appointed himself governor and selected his Supreme Court and other territorial officials with headquarters southeast of the plaza. Baylor liked Mesilla, and treated the natives in a friendly manner. He was very liberal with his confederate money, which was paper. And the following year, when General Carleton, commanding the California Volunteers,

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captured Mesilla for the Union cause, the merchants almost went bankrupt, trying to exchange Baylor's paper money for sound currency."

There is a current story in Old Mesilla about a certain Yankee of the early days who had a habit of serenading dark-eyed señoritas. There is still considerable doubt as to how he mixed his drinks, but none whatever regarding the way he chili-con-carned his English and Spanish. For this gallant Yank's favorite ditty accompanied by the strum, strum, of an old guitar, went something like this: Te quiero, te quiero because you are the dream angel of mi vida, Y mi amor that you control Makes my very timid soul Sing with highest joy, mi querida; Ah! when I see your star-lit eyes, Beaming with mucho "come hither," Mi corazon muy furioso beats, And performs many romantic feats For you, for you only, mi querida.

Mesilla, New Mexico, a historic town with a quaint Spanish atmosphere, has about 1200 inhabitants. It is situated in the heart of the Mesilla Valley, on State Highway No. 28, two miles west of Las Cruces, New Mexico, and U. S. Highway No. 80. It is the center of the Mesilla Colony Grant, containing twenty-four square miles of the richest land in the valley. Mesilla is forty-five miles from El Paso, Texas, the metropolis of the southwest.

A few days ago, while nosing around the streets of Old Mesilla, I had the good fortune to meet Cruz R. Alvarez again. He called my attention to the old jail where Billy the Kid was incarcerated, saying:

"He was a tough customer, ruthless with his enemies, but generous to his friends, the native rancheros. His good looks, charming personality, and fine dancing won him

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the admiration of the younger set, who considered him a gay caballero. But he was a desperado, a gunman and a killer, who was sentenced to be hung, April 15, 1881."

"In Dona Ana County?"

"No, in Lincoln County. Colonel A.J. Fountain, who organized the New Mexico Militia, was Billy the Kid's defence counsel." he said.

"Perhaps I had better tell you something about the old stage coaches, "Mr Alvarez said. "South of the plaza, adjoining the Valley Mercantile Company buildings is the station site of the Butterfield stage coaches, which used to carry steel-nerved passengers in quest of adventure and fortunes. Travelling from San Antonio, Texas, over a rugged, Indian and bandit-infested route to San Diego, California. The Hospitality and gayety of early Mesilla appealed to the California gold hunters much as an oasis appeals to the tongue-parched nomads of the Sahara."

Mesilla was also the county seat of Dona Ana County until the latter part of the 19th century, when the railroad entered this Apache-infested-region. In those days the railroads were an invaluable asset to any town, and would have helped advance Mesilla to a great extent. But the early land owners emphatically refused to donate sufficient land to the A.T.& S.F. railway for a right of way through Mesilla. Hence, the railroad, was built two miles east through Las Cruces, where the county seat is now located.

"A large percentage of the tourists, visiting Mesilla, invariably want to know where to find the old Chihuahua Santa Fe Trail, "Mr. Alvarez said. "When we tell them it is right here, they seem surprised. The famous Chihuahua Santa Fe Trail is the route over which De

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Vargas with his soldiers and Franciscan friars entered New Mexico in 1692, To the south, within a distance of twenty-five miles on this historic trail, there are several quaint Spanish pueblos with their typical mission churches--San Miguel, La Mesa, Chamberino, and La Union, formerly called Los Amoles."

There are several good stores in Old Mesilla. E. V. Gaboa's Valley Mercantile Company, where the U.S. post office is located; Patio Cafe, Mesilla Garage, Gadsden Museum Art Gallery (In the Albert Fountain family home) and Billy the Kid museum. Guerra's Theater Building, Bermudez Mission Grape Nurseries, Locke's Asparagus Farms; St. Albinus, a French-Roman type of church, modern public school building and an active Chamber of Commerce.

"Mr. Alvarez, " I said, " I always thought Billy the Kid was shot."

"He was, but that occurred after he escaped from the Lincoln jail."

"Escaped?"

"Yes, killing both of his guards. Prior to his incarceration, April 1, 1878, he killed sheriff William Brady and George Hineman. On July 15, 1881; Pat Garrett, the sheriff of Lincoln County and two deputies, discovered " Billy the Kid at the home of Pete Maxwell; near Fort Sumner. The outlaw walked into Maxwell's bedroom and was shot by Garrett.

Cruz Richards Alvarez: Born in La Union, New Mexico, September 14, 1896; son of Mr. and Mrs. Deonicio Alvarez of La Union; Graduate, Industrial Commercial Department, State College; New Mexico; Teacher of Spanish in Las Vegas Normal University; Teacher

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in Hollywood, California Secretarial School; Teacher El Paso Vocational School, El Paso, Texas; Attached to American Embassy Madrid, Spain, during World War; Married and has two Children, Consuelo a girl and Benjamin, a boy; Wife was Fanny Bermudez, granddaughter of Dan Rafael Bermudez, Customs Collector for Mexico in Mesilla up to 1854.